

The President. I don't know. That's up to the Congress. Only the Congress can shut the Government down, and only the Congress can reopen it. But they can certainly reopen it, and I hope they will, particularly this week. It's just wrong for the Federal employees, and even more for the American people, to have the Government close the week before Christmas. It is a decision they made, and they can undo it and I hope they will.

Q. Do you share the concerns, Mr. President, of the financial markets that lack of a budget agreement may keep interest rates locked in place or even turn them around and head them back upward?

The President. Well, let me say this. I think the action of the Federal Reserve today—although I don't want to comment on the merits of it one way or the other, but there's a general understanding that we have a—first of all, back in '93, we made some very tough decisions without any bipartisan support to bring the deficit down and to increase investment in technology and research and education and the environment, things that would grow the economy. Interest rates came down; billions of dollars were invested; there was a homebuilding boom; we got the economy going again.

The fundamentals of this economy were sound. There is good growth. There is low infla-

tion—I will say again, the lowest combined rates of inflation and unemployment in 27 years. And we have to continue on that track. I think the message ought to be to people who are concerned about that is that this deficit is going to keep coming down, regardless. There is too much determination for that. That is not what this debate is all about. The deficit will keep coming down, regardless. The leadership of both parties favors that.

But we must have a 7-year balanced budget plan that reflects our other values. We are doing well in the world economy because the deficit is coming down and because the other things that are being done in the private sector are good and because the other things the Government is doing are good things. So we have to keep doing all the right things if we want to succeed. That's what the debate over the budget plan is about.

If the markets are worried about whether the deficit is going to keep coming down, they should forget about that. The deficit is going to keep coming down, regardless.

Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:34 p.m. in the Oval Office at the White House.

Message to the House of Representatives Returning Without Approval the Departments of Commerce, Justice, and State, the Judiciary, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act, 1996

December 19, 1995

To the House of Representatives:

I am returning herewith without my approval H.R. 2076, the "Departments of Commerce, Justice, and State, the Judiciary, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act, 1996."

This bill does not meet the priorities and needs of our Nation and people. It would undermine our ability to fight the war on crime; decimate technology programs that are critical to building a strong U.S. economy; and weaken our leadership in the world by drastically cutting funding for international organizations, peacekeeping, and other international affairs activities.

First, the bill represents an unacceptable retreat in our fight against crime and drugs. It eliminates my COPS initiative (Community Oriented Policing Services) to put 100,000 more police officers on the street. Already, this initiative has put thousands of police on the street, working hand-in-hand with their communities to fight crime. The block grant that H.R. 2076 would offer instead would not guarantee a single new police officer. That's not what the American people want, and I won't accept it. As I have said, I will not sign any version of this bill that does not fund the COPS initiative as a free-

standing, discretionary grant program, as authorized.

The bill also eliminates my “drug courts” initiative. And it unwisely abandons crime prevention efforts such as the Ounce of Prevention Council and the Community Relations Service. I am also disappointed that the funding levels in the bill fall short of my request for the Drug Enforcement Administration, and OCDETF (Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Force). This is no time to let down our guard in the fight against drugs.

Second, the bill constitutes a short-sighted assault on the Commerce Department’s technology programs that work effectively with business to expand our economy, help Americans compete in the global marketplace, and create high quality jobs. As we approach a new, technology-driven century, it makes no sense to eliminate an industry-driven, highly competitive, cost-shared initiative like our Advanced Technology Program (ATP), which fosters technology development, promotes industrial alliances, and creates jobs. Nor does it make sense to sharply cut funding for measures that will help assure our long-term growth and competitiveness—such as our National Information Infrastructure grants program, which helps connect schools, hospitals, and libraries to the information super-highway; the GLOBE program, which promotes the study of science and the environment in our schools; the Manufacturing Extension Partnership, which helps small manufacturers meet the hi-tech demands of the new marketplace; Defense Conversion; or the Technology Administration. And I oppose the bill’s harmful cuts for the Census Bureau and for economic and statistical analysis.

Third, I am deeply concerned that this bill would undermine our global leadership and impair our ability to protect and defend important U.S. interests around the world—both by making unwise cuts in funding for international organizations and peacekeeping activities, and by cutting programs of the State Department, the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency, and the United States Information Agency. These cuts would impair our ability to support important activities such as the nonproliferation of weapons, the promotion of human rights, and

the control of infectious disease like the Ebola virus. Moreover, sections of the bill include inappropriate restrictive language, including language limiting the conduct of U.S. diplomatic relations with Vietnam, that I believe infringe on Presidential prerogatives. And I cannot accept the provision that would cut off all funding for these agencies on April 1, 1996, unless the State Department Authorization Act and related legislation had been signed into law.

Fourth, the bill includes three additional provisions that I cannot accept.

It cripples the capacity of the Legal Services Corporation (LSC) to fulfill its historic mission of serving people in need—slashing its overall funding, sharply limiting the administrative funds LSC needs to conduct its business, and imposing excessive restrictions on LSC’s operations. LSC should be allowed to carry on its work in an appropriate manner, both in its basic programs and in special initiatives like the migrant legal services program.

Section 103 of the bill would prohibit the use of funds for performing abortions, except in cases involving rape or danger to the life of the mother. The Justice Department has advised that there is a substantial risk that this provision would be held unconstitutional as applied to female prison inmates.

The bill also includes an ill-considered legislative rider that would impose a moratorium on future listings under the Endangered Species Act by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and other agencies. That rider not only would make bad policy, it also has no place in this bill.

Finally, I would urge the Congress to continue the Associate Attorney General’s office.

For these reasons and others my Administration has conveyed to the Congress in earlier communications, I cannot accept this bill. H.R. 2076 does not reflect my priorities or the values of the American people. I urge the Congress to send me an appropriations bill that truly serves this Nation and its people.

WILLIAM J. CLINTON

The White House,
December 19, 1995.